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A Lady —————
and Her Letters.

By KATHERINE E. CONWAY.

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A

Lady and Her Letters

By KATHERINE E. CONWAY. ✓



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PILOT PUBLISHING COMPANY.

1895.

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Poems. Second edition.

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Edited and with estimate. Fourth
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Dedication.

To

The Friends at whose desire I have made it,

I dedicate

This Little Book.

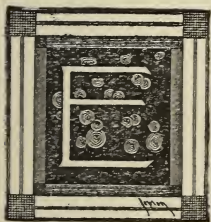
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A LADY AND HER LETTERS.

I.

The Long-Lived Written Word.



EVERYBODY has to write letters. Some one of the hundreds of letters which the most ordinary individual will write in the course of his life-time, may make or mar his whole career. Every letter of the hundreds will have its own influence for or against his advancement or happiness. Every one, therefore, should know how to write letters.

Should the composition classes and literary courses in our schools, the post-graduate literary societies and reading circles, of after years, accomplish nothing but to fit the man and woman of average intelligence to

perform well this necessary and frequent duty, they would nevertheless more than justify their existence.

It seems a simple thing to write a letter. Granting that one knows how to write and spell and construct a sentence, there should be, it would seem, no further difficulty. Yet of a multitude of clever, fairly educated people, how few are adepts in the fine art of letter-writing!

Why is it so? Do our teachers, in giving the rules for acquiring the power of expression in writing forget to emphasize their most ordinary and necessary application? The topics set for a school-girl especially are often too formal, or too remote from her every-day interests and sympathies. Why task her with writing "A Parallel between the Characters of Napoleon and Washington," or an essay on "The Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians" — we are drawing from real life — when she might far better be set at framing an invitation to luncheon or dinner and the answer thereto; an application for a position, or the response to an employer's advertisement for assistants; or, for the development of descriptive powers and a slight indulgence to sentiment and fancy, a letter to a friend, describing the most eventful week in the writer's summer vacation?

So much of character and breeding is inevitably revealed in letters, that too great pains cannot be taken that the revelation be not discreditable and damaging.

Most of the counsels that apply to the spoken word of virtuous and well-bred people, apply with even greater force to the written word. For the spoken word may be half-heard, or forgotten ; but the written word remains ; and may come back in the most unexpected time and manner, either to the praise or the confusion of the writer.

It behooves one, therefore, to know well what she is about when, to quote from the old-fashioned exordium to the letters of simple people, she "takes her pen in hand."



II.

Business Letters.



BUSINESS letter should be as brief as is consistent with clearness, precision, and courtesy. It should be neatly and legibly written, and dated and signed with the utmost formality.

Introduce no irrelevant matter. If a lady has been hindered from keeping an appointment with her legal adviser at 3 P. M., she should not write a long letter to say that she had an appointment with her dentist at 2 o'clock, and it was so much more trying than she expected, and she was really ill, and had to go right home. Let her simply say that indisposition hindered her from keeping her appointment; and make up her mind to avoid so awkward a conjunction of appointments another time.

If she is ordering goods of any description by letter, her order should be written fully and clearly, the address at which they are to be delivered and the

date on which they are desired, given with scrupulous accuracy, and a copy of the letter kept, until after the order has been satisfactorily filled.

If a mistake should be made in filling the order, let her see first if, perhaps, her own carelessness in ordering may not be in some sort responsible. In any event, the mistake must be courteously indicated. No matter how aggravating the blunder or the delay, she will not write a petulant nor an angry letter. And I can hardly think of an occurrence which would justify a letter of complaint of the subordinate with whom one may have had business correspondence, to his or her employer.

Nowhere are definiteness, accuracy, legibility, neatness, and courtesy more necessary than in the correspondence between an applicant for employment and her possible employer. The fate of her application not seldom depends on her first letter.

A lady will hardly engage for governess, companion or secretary, the candidate whose application is carelessly worded and scrawled in a slovenly hand on vulgar stationery.

The business man will not be prepossessed in favor of the would-be clerk who forgets to date her letter, and who reverses his initials on the superscription.

The literary aspirant should never imagine that an illegible handwriting will pass for a sign of genius. She would better have her MS. typewritten. She will not help her case with the editor by telling him that it's a first attempt — he will probably discover that in a moment himself; or that she has just "dashed it off" in a moment of enthusiasm; or that she wants it published, because her father or her husband subscribes for the paper, and she would like to give them a little surprise; or that she is greatly in need of money, and would like to have, by return mail, whatever her MS. may be worth.

Neither will she pave the way for a favorable judgment by telling him that a large circle of intelligent friends admires her work and urges its publication. There is no salvation for her literary efforts save in their own intrinsic merit, and the editor reserves the right to judge of that. There is nothing to be done but to send the MS., legibly written and addressed and sufficiently stamped, with a stamped and addressed envelope for its possible return trip to the sender.

A woman's good sense and good breeding are indicated in her choice of stationery, whether in business or friendly correspondence. She does not use pink or green or other high-colored stationery; nor the

gilt-edged, nor fantastically shaped varieties. White or cream-tinted stationery, of smooth finish and firm texture, and ordinary size is always safe. Monograms and sentimental devices should be avoided. A lady with much correspondence does well to have her home address stamped at the head of her note and letter sheets. She should write with good black ink. Colored inks are in bad taste.

One can hardly be too scrupulous in the matter of dates, signatures, and addresses, especially in business correspondence. Don't write at the head of the sheet, "Boston, Thursday," giving your home address somewhere in the body of the letter. Write, rather for example, "1 Grosvenor Park, Boston, Nov. 15, 1894." A married lady should not use her husband's name in her signature. She signs herself "Ellen T. Mortimer," not "Mrs. John M. Mortimer." In writing even to an absolute stranger, she signs as above, writing at the foot of the sheet, Address, Mrs. John M. Mortimer, or enclosing her card.

An unmarried lady writing to a stranger, may indicate how she is to be addressed, either by enclosing her card, or putting Miss in parenthesis before her signature.

We need say nothing about the odious brusqueness

sometimes affected by very young women under the impression that it is "business-like," of preluding their signature with "Yours, etc."!

One has always time to write "Yours truly," "Yours sincerely," "Yours respectfully," all of which are proper forms according to the relative positions of writer and recipient in business correspondence.



III.

Courtesy and Kindness in all Letters.



HE well-bred woman has sometimes, like every one else, disagreeable duties to perform ; among them, the writing of business letters which she would rejoice not to be obliged to write.

But she differs from other women in this, that she can do her disagreeable duties courteously. She may have to remind a debtor of his indebtedness, but she will phrase her letter so that while her meaning is clear, he will not be harassed nor humiliated.

The truly well-bred woman is a patient creditor. She does not lend money recklessly, leaving her own debts unpaid ; but when she has made a loan, she does not make the life of the person she has obliged a burden until the debt is liquidated.

She does business transactions in a business-like way. It is unlikely that she will ever be asked to advance a large sum of money without security. However good the security may be, the borrower

assumes not only the money debt, but a debt of gratitude as well; and if he or she be of an honorable nature, it is not at all likely that the latter debt will be forgotten, even after the former has been paid.

So it is not necessary to rub the obligation in till the flesh of the debtor tingles.

Let any of us who are blessed with abundance of this world's goods be large-minded in our dealings, especially with the less favored. Having loaned the money, and been duly secured, let us forget the incident till the note comes due. If it be not promptly paid, wait a little for an explanation; and if it be deemed necessary to write, be kind; assume that there is a good reason for the delay. If some excuse is offered, and more time is asked, accept the excuse and grant an extension of time, if you possibly can. Do it magnanimously; not meanly and grudgingly.

If aught has happened between the lending of the money and the time of its coming due, to make it very necessary or desirable that you should have it at once, say so courteously. But don't press a poor debtor, either by nagging letters, or threatening letters; nor proceed to extreme measures with any debtor, unless you have the gravest reason to believe that you are being victimized by some one who can without difficulty pay his debt.

This is not business-like advice, perhaps, but there is a higher thing than business ; and if you have abundance of means and the delay, however long, of money loaned, means not a deprivation of comforts, but, at worst, a little retrenchment in luxuries, choose rather to be known before God and man as lenient and forbearing — though the shrewd call you foolish — than praised as a hard-headed business woman who can't be fooled.

Should your debtor be a conscientious, high-minded woman, who really wants to pay you, and is delayed by unforeseen illness, family troubles, want of work, or any such things, think of her shame and humiliation, renewed again and again at every one of those curt, mortifying notes, which are so easy to write and so hard to read.

It is your right? — Yes ; but mercy is higher than justice ; and you are suffering nothing by your temporary inconvenience in comparison with what she is suffering for being the cause of it.

Don't write high-handed dunning letters ; don't remind a debtor of the gratitude she owes you ; don't do any of the brutal, cruel things which the rich or well-to-do have in their power against the needy or the lowly, without first reading Christ's parable of

the servant to whom the debt of ten thousand talents was forgiven, and who thereafter put his fellow-servant in prison for a debt of one hundred pence.

“But,” say certain possible readers, “comparatively few of us are rich women. We are not in a position to make loans of a thousand, or even a few hundred dollars; so that what you say about ‘good security,’ ‘forbearance,’ ‘extension of time,’ etc., doesn’t apply to us. We are not called upon to practise the magnanimity you urge on us. Our little money transactions deal with dollars or even fractions of dollars, where it would be absurd to raise serious business questions.”

True; but the counsel to delicacy and forbearance in the matter of five hundred dollars applies equally to twenty or even to five; for these qualities are as often absent in the creditor for the small as for the large amount.

It is true that the habit of borrowing is an exceedingly bad one, and that the chronic borrower should be discouraged for his or her own sake; but occasions will arrive in the lives of the best and most independent, when they will need, for a mile or two of the road, a helping hand, and if we are now able to give it, can we say that the day will never dawn when in turn we shall need it?

We remember a conscientious woman who borrowed fifteen dollars from a near friend to tide over an emergency which had to be met before the money could be earned. She had counted on repaying within a month; but a few days after the loan had been made, she had a long letter from the lender, detailing sundry little losses which she had had through the carelessness of a servant, and closely estimating the money damage; narrating also, the inconvenience she was at, through small sums owed by friends, etc. The fifteen dollars was still a week out of the reach of the debtor; but it was the longest week she ever knew.

If one has made these small loans, it is mean beyond expression to gossip about them with other friends, either in speech or letter; for in the case of debtors sure to repay you, you needlessly betray their trust and impair their credit; and in the case of careless debtors or those lacking conscience, you reveal your own weakness in trusting them, without helping your chances of getting your money back.

IV.

Food for Your Waste-Basket.



OMEN of known wealth, and successful professional women often receive borrowing letters — or to call them properly, begging letters — from absolute strangers.

These usually run something after this fashion : —

DEAR MADAM — Though but a short time in the city, I have heard on every side of your magnificent generosity. You are universally esteemed as a humanitarian of the noblest type. This encourages me, a stranger, to appeal to you for a small temporary assistance. I have seen better days ; and am now maintaining myself and my two children, by the exercise of those gifts which formerly delighted a select social circle. Can you lend me twenty dollars till the next quarter of one of my wealthy music-pupils comes due. I have to go to my sick, perhaps dying, husband at Walnutville. I can send you for security an ancestral jewel of great value. It is in my husband's possession, etc. Your suffering fellow-woman,

It is strange that any woman of even relative maturity and experience should fall a victim to a letter like this, but it is true that such an appeal entraps many a victim. Women are soft-hearted, and the reference to one's reputation for generosity is irresistible, even to women who think they are not vain.

The place for such letters is the waste-basket. But, if you have a lingering fear that you may be neglecting a God-sent call, take the trouble to investigate a little first. Otherwise don't demand sympathy if you are taken in.

A lady does not borrow of any one without the extremest need, and when she has contracted a loan she scrupulously retrenches unnecessary expenses until she has repaid it.

But she never appeals to utter strangers for loans. This is a trick, resorted to either by utterly unsophisticated and ill-balanced young women, or — and this more commonly — by hardened adventuresses.

V.

What of the Postal Card?



HEN is it permissible to use a postal card?" asks a young friend.

"My dear," replies an old-fashioned gentlewoman, who looks in on us occasionally, "I never yet have been able to bring my-

self to use one of those wretched things."

We sympathize with the dear lady's sentiment, for the most part; for, with letter postage at two cents,—to put matters on the lowest plane—there is scant justification for using postal cards, even on the score of needful economy.

But the postal card has a few well-defined and permissible uses.

In these days of numerous and large feminine organizations, the secretary of a society may notify members of meetings by postal card.

One may, with one's own family or a very familiar friend, announce by postal, the despatch of a box or

parcel by express, especially, if the latter contain a letter. Or, under the same conditions, and if greatly pressed for time, one may mention the train by which one expects to arrive from a short journey.

If some one writes for information which can be given in a word or two, — enclosing an addressed postal for the answer, a lady will use the postal; for, to do otherwise, would be to reflect on the manners of the sender.

And here, we think we have exhausted the uses of the postal among well-bred people.

The postal, in the above cases, must contain nothing but the briefest business statement; no address but the superscription; no terms of endearment, no diminutives in signature; not a syllable of news nor other irrelevant matter.

Here is a good form —

MISS AMANDA JONES,
325 LAKE AVE.,
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

(On reverse side),

BOSTON, Dec. 19, 1894.

Box despatched this afternoon by American Express Company.

MARY JONES.

To write on a postal card particulars of your health, inquiries for the health of others, bits of domestic news or local gossip, Christmas greetings, etc., is about as vulgar as it would be to stand on the public street, and call out such information or inquiries to a friend on the other side.

And yet, many women who mean well, and who would be greatly surprised and grieved if they imagined a doubt were raised as to their good-breeding, constantly do these things !

The feminine passion for postals has even worse possibilities.

Have we not seen a check for one hundred dollars and the kind and courteous letter in which it was enclosed, acknowledged on a postal ! As a receipt, it would stand in law, of course ; but who would feel much desire to cultivate a closer acquaintance with the person capable of sending it ?

Have we not seen a Christmas gift acknowledged on a postal card, so closely covered with minute particulars of the sender's health, that it was difficult to decipher it ! As if any one able to perform this feat of chirography on a card, might not have done it on a letter-sheet !

Have we not seen the birth of a son and heir

announced by postal ! Can't we recall two women — friends — old and experienced enough to know better — interchanging frequent accounts of their respective summering at beach and mountain, with allusions even to their "Cavaliers," as they called them, — on postal cards ? Have we not seen the postal in which — of all things — one woman conveyed to another her opinion of a third person's discourtesy ?

Here is a specimen of the postal card sentimental, so to speak, which is almost a literal transcript from life : —

———— Feb. 11, 1894.

DEAR FRIEND : Your sweet letter came the other day, and now with the twilight shadows falling about me, I send you this little line of acknowledgment and affectionate greeting. May Heaven bless you. . . .

One would not be overwhelmed with surprise at getting congratulations on one's marriage, per postal, from the writer of the above.

It is a question with well-bred people, whether any postals, except the exceedingly few that are permissible, as described, deserve answer or notice in any way. At all events, something should be done to stop careless and inconsiderate people from loading the mails with such matter.

"But," pleads somebody, "they're so handy ; and bad taste isn't a sin, I should hope, that it should be denounced so severely."

True ; but bad taste is a sort of danger signal that indicates people, who, if duty does not bind us to them, it is well for us to avoid, lest they become stumbling-blocks to us.

Says Lilian Whiting in her "World Beautiful" :
"A fault of taste . . . is rooted in personality. It is the external manifestation of an internal defect. . . . It is not the result of an impulse of the moment, of a flash of temper, or some erratic and temporary emotion ; it is simply a thing that reveals the grain of life, its very quality."

But defects of taste, like all other defects, can be overcome, if their possessor be observant and not too strong in self-love.



VI.

Family Correspondence.



HAT a delight to the homesick sojourner in a distant city or a strange land are long, minute, and warm-hearted letters from home! And a delight at least equal to the home-dwellers, especially if their circle of relatives and friends be small, and their lives uneventful, are the letters from the absent dear one, descriptive of a larger life and of unfamiliar scenes and customs.

Such interchange of letters between the separated members of a family tends, more than anything else, to keep warm and bright the glow of family affection. How sad to see those who were nursed at the same breasts, brought up to adolescence under the same roof, drifted hopelessly apart in mature years and even ignorant of one another's whereabouts!

"Somehow, we stopped writing and lost sight of one another," is the common explanation.

Once, and not so long ago, it was only the sons who went afar "to seek their fortune," as the fairy stories have it. The daughters almost never changed the town or city of their home, much less their native skies, except through marriage.

But now it is quite as likely to be the daughter as the son of the family of limited means, who goes away to accept a more remunerative position than she can get in her birthplace. Then, with the reduced rates and improved facilities for foreign travel, many young women have the chance of a trip abroad.

Whatever her duties or her pleasures, the absent one should make time for at least weekly letters to her family. And to whom should the most of these letters go? Surely, if the father and mother are living, to them first of all.

To say nothing of the evidence of unkindness, there is hardly a surer proof of inherent vulgarity in a family than the disposition to overlook the parents. The young woman who thinks that, because her mother is advanced in age, she needs in the way of dress little more than a decent covering, since "she never goes anywhere, anyhow," is reasonably certain to address her letters home to her favorite sister or brother, or mayhap to her chum outside the family,

on the plea that "Mother hardly ever writes a letter herself," and that Frank, or Sadie, or Nellie, will tell her anything of interest.

If she could know what a pride and joy a letter all to herself would be to the dear old mother, and how soon that mother would develop into an excellent correspondent, I think her action would be different.

With women, in most cases, friends and interests fall off, as life advances. The mother, especially, is likely to get out of relation with her own early friends during that long period — the best years of her life — that are absorbed by the care of her young children. In this way, perhaps she falls a little behind the times. Her interests are narrowed to the home-circle.

By-and-by, her children leave the home-nest, or become largely occupied with interests outside the home. How sad for the mother if she is made to feel that she can be no longer companionable to her children, now that her immediate use to them is over; if they are the first to punish her for the consequences of the sacrifices which she has made in their behalf!

Write often to the mother. We remember an aged lady who was kept in the closest interest with the topics of the day, and who developed into a regular and most interesting correspondent through the neces-

sity of answering the frequent letters of an absent son and daughter. If they could have realized the zest their letters gave to her declining years, and the pleasure she took in obtaining information which they requested, and writing her detailed accounts of the home doings, they would have been more than repaid for any slight effort involved in the keeping up of a frequent correspondence. We do not, of course, mean to suggest the exclusion or limitation of other interchange of letters; but only to say that the true lady is always minutely considerate of her own; that she never slights her parents while God leaves them to her; and that if her time for correspondence be limited, she thinks of them most frequently.

Letters home, to whomsoever addressed, should be kind and cheerful, and as interesting as one's opportunities permit one to make them. Never write sharply or pettishly. The written word, implying always, as it does, some degree of premeditation, is vastly more cruel than the unkind spoken word. Never write unnecessary bad news. Don't, for example, write from Chicago to Boston of that little indisposition which probably will have vanished before your letter reaches its destination. Don't write of your trifling disappointments, nor of the accidents

that can be repaired. And these cautions hold good also for the letters from home to the absent one.

The poor Irish widow sending news to her son in America, in Ellen Forrester's touching little poem, is a model of kindly forethought : —

“Tell him the spotted heifer calved in May;
She died, poor thing; *but that you needn't mind;*
Nor how the constant rain destroyed the hay;
But tell him God to us was ever kind,
And when the fever spread the country o'er,
His mercy kept the sickness from our door.

“Be sure you tell him how the neighbors came
And cut the corn and stored it in the barn;
'Twould be as well to mention them by name —
Pat Murphy, Ned McCabe and James McCarn,
And big Tim Daly from behind the hill;
But say, agra — Oh, say I missed him still.”

Separated dear ones may suffer an immense amount of unnecessary pain, through want of knowing what not to write in their letters.

VII.

One Safe Confidential Correspondent.



ORETHOUGHT and consideration do not, however, imply want of confidence.

The young woman, far from her kindred, in a strange city, needs a trusty confidant. If she be wise, her letters home, especially her letters to her father or mother, will be the safety-valve for her natural desire for sympathy. It is dangerous to open one's heart to the chance acquaintance of boarding-house, or place of employment.

It will do much more for the young stranger than merely to relieve her mind, if she accustom herself to full and frank communication with the dear ones at home.

Writing to her mother, she need never fear to be accounted tiresome nor egotistical. While, as we have already said, she should not trouble that sensitive, anxious heart with minute accounts of trivial and

transitory ailments, nor disappointments nor accidents which will be comforted or repaired before her letter can reach its destination, still in all matters of consequence, in all cases where she feels the need of counsel, let her write freely to the one who is ordinarily the most patient, prudent and sympathetic of confidants.

If she has gone away in quest of a better livelihood, let her tell her mother all about her work; its advantages and disadvantages; the associates it gives her, her employers, her remuneration, her progress. Sometimes, progress is very slow, and the worker cannot imagine why others are promoted while she remains stationary. If she has been frank with her mother, perhaps that patient and experienced friend can show her, without hurting her self-esteem, where her want of diligence or tact is keeping her back.

Don't be selfish and shrewd with your family. Don't suppress your successes in writing home, lest they ask a little more help at your hands than you want to give. Perhaps there is an unthrifty brother or sister, who is, as such a one is likely to be, the mother's darling solicitude, and for whom you may be imposed upon a little.

Even so, let not the first knowledge of your improv-

ing fortunes come to your parents from strangers. Be large-hearted, and give what help you can, even at some personal inconvenience or sacrifice. There will come a day when the remembrance of a little selfishness and adroitness with one's kindred will give no pleasure.

We do not mean to excuse the practice common in some families of putting too large a share of the common burden on one; nor of feeling that the successful one should have little personal advantage out of his or her success. Nor do we question the existence of occasional cases where entire confidence is impossible.

But ordinarily, there are ways of meeting the contingency above suggested in a frank and kindly spirit. The mere fact of being away from home, enables one to draw more firmly the line between sweetly rendered duty and pernicious self-sacrifice.

But while telling your successes, don't exaggerate them, nor raise on slight foundation, hopes that cannot be realized.

Be frank, too, about the social side of your life. Here the greater knowledge and sympathy of a mother may be of inestimable value to the young woman who is making her way among strangers.

Higher social opportunities may come to the daugh-

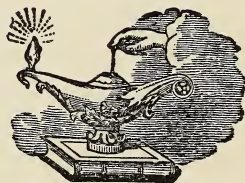
ter than have fallen to the mother's share ; and complexities may arise for which her humbler experience affords no parallel. But human nature does not change ; and on all serious things, the mother's counsel is sure to be worth having.

In the matter of love-affairs, real or imaginary, the young woman of expansive temperament will save herself untold mortification and perhaps serious trouble, if—at least until after she has had an unmistakable offer of marriage—she will restrict her written confidences to her mother.

Let the letters from home to the absent one be equally candid and kindly. A long, affectionate cheery letter from home on a gloomy and troubled day, may be a turning point in a young life.

Answer her letters in detail. Show interest in her struggles, and pleasure in her successes. Don't imagine that the smallest details of the home-life—the new carpet in the parlor, Julia's first party-gown, or the visit of John's chum, or the school-triumphs of the smallest brother or sister, or the flourishing condition of mother's house-plants, or father's vacation week, are not worth writing. Tell her about the friends who call at the house. Forget no message that shows she is affectionately remembered in her girlhood's home.

Do your share in strengthening those bonds which should be so flexible and finely tempered, that however far they may have to stretch, they will still never break.



VIII.

Letters One would Fain Recall.



IT is in Switzerland, I think, that women are regarded as never coming of age in the sense of being able to forego guardianship of some sort. There are times when beholding the imprudences which some women — women, too, well out of their teens — are capable of in letter-writing, one is disposed to see much sense in the Swiss idea, and to wish for its application — in a discriminating way of course — in America.

Why are women whose training would lead one to look for wiser things, so willing, not to say eager, to enter on correspondences with people of whom they know little; and to commit themselves in indelible ink, to confidences and sentiments, which in years to come they will remember with fear and shame?

Perhaps the question can be answered in a way rather complimentary than otherwise to our sex. The

average woman, even though she be "in society," as the phrase has it, knows, after all, comparatively little of the wicked and heartless world with which men are familiar. Her judgments of men are generally superficial and favorable. Having but little foresight, she has little thought of consequences.

Hence, she drifts quickly into intimacy with the agreeable stranger of either sex, and, if a separation takes place at an early stage of this intimacy, continues by letter the dangerous self-revealings, family business, or personal gossip much less dangerous by word of mouth.

"What is written is written," and these foolish letters will outlive the intimacy of which they were the fruit, and be in damaging evidence, even when that intimacy may have turned to aversion.

Whatever may be said of the prodigality of mutual confidences between women in their letters, there is scant excuse for the reckless effusions of women to men. We are not speaking now of the letters of lovers, on which the whole world smiles indulgently, but of what is called friendly correspondence. Oh, friendship, what mistakes are made in thy name!

After the folly is realized and repented of by the man or the woman — usually the latter — the question arises, "How did it ever begin?"

Did he write first, asking her for the name of that book she mentioned the day before he went away; and adding to the inquiry a few lines to say how much he missed the chats they used to have together? And did she answer promptly, and at much greater length, giving not only the name of the book, but her opinion of it, and stating with perhaps a little over-emphasis of regret, how much she too, missed the chats?

And did it go on, till they were exchanging letters twice a week — just friendly letters of course! — when one day she learned on indisputable evidence that this man who had her photograph, and entirely too much of her personal history, was an utterly good-for-nothing fellow, with whom she should not have exchanged a line?

Or, did this correspondence — only friendly, she would say — begin to take hold on her foolish little heart, and did all days seem dull and dreary save those on which the letters came?

And presently did his letters begin to grow shorter and farther apart, and did her awaking come in the shape of a marked newspaper announcing his marriage, presumably to some young woman who was not quite so good a correspondent?

However it was, letters of hers are extant which she would give worlds to have in her own hands again.

Well for her, if her nature be so modest and sensitive that she takes the bitter lesson humbly to heart, and never needs a repetition of it; for then it gives to her life a grace that perhaps before was lacking — making her distrustful of herself, and wise and merciful for others.



IX.

A Question of Common Sense.



VEN where the man in question is an old acquaintance and a man of honor, the woman should still beware of any over-eagerness for correspondence. In these days, when women are so active in literature and journalism; when wage-earning women are constantly brought into every-day business relations with men; and when even women of leisure, through their activity in religious and charitable organizations, have much necessary intercourse both in speech and letter, with the clergy, public men, their masculine associates in good works, it is important to remember the good sense, consideration, and reserve which mark the correspondence of the wise and well-bred woman.

In the cases suggested above, the woman is often obliged, by the exigencies of business or charity, to open the correspondence. The interchange of notes may be necessarily frequent, without the slightest idea on either part of personal interest in the writer. But

if such friendly interest should be awakened, let the evidence of it, by all means, begin on the man's side.

Good sense and delicacy in a woman do not imply prudery. If the correspondent adds to his business communication a friendly inquiry, or suggests an appointment to talk over some case which it is difficult to settle by letter, she must not, in the name of all that is gracious and sensible, put into such proceeding a meaning which is far from the man's thoughts; and astonish and annoy him with a coquettish or a prudish answer. She must be frank and simple, as she would be with one of her own sex in a similar case; answering his kind inquiry pleasantly; studying his convenience in the appointment.

She must not expect a priest to neglect his sick-calls, nor any other busy man to leave his patients, or clients, or customers, to attend her in her drawing-room for a discussion of the ways and means to the Authors' Reading which she is getting up for her pet charity, the Home for Aged Couples. She must consider the time and strength of the man who is making the sacrifice of needed rest or recreation to assist her good work, and allow him to render his services in the way which suits him best

I remember here the visit to Boston a few years

ago of a gentlewoman famous for her position and ancestry, and still more widely and honorably known for her noble work in developing the Cottage Industries of Ireland. She brought with her, among her introductions to notable Bostonians, one to a well-known lawyer.

As this gentleman emerged from his private office one afternoon, after a long consultation with a client, he noticed at the end of the row of clients awaiting their turn, a strange lady of distinguished bearing. He advanced towards her, whereupon, she presented her letter and her coronetted card.

"But, Lady ——" he exclaimed, "why did you not send these to me, and allow me the pleasure of calling on you at your hotel, in the interest of a cause which I also have at heart."

"Because your time is more precious than mine," she answered pleasantly; "and I am asking a service at your hands which, with your own professional duties, it will inconvenience you to render, however great your sympathy."

The wise and truly self-respecting woman is not conceited. Hence, when a man honors her request for his co-operation in some good work, she accounts the service done for the sake of the work, not for her

sake ; and is always convinced that the same assent had been given as cheerfully to any other petitioner.

In her written intercourse with men on matters of business or charity, the well-bred woman, if a widow or maiden, is devoid of that silly self-consciousness which sees in every unmarried man a possible admirer.

A young woman needing information on a matter of concern to her was directed to address the business manager of a certain publishing house, with whom she had already a slight acquaintance.

But she blushed and bridled. Oh never ! how could she write to him. What would people think ? Wasn't he a fascinating bachelor !

It would have been a little cruel perhaps — though wholesome in the long run — to answer that the correspondence could be a matter of indifference even to one of the participators in it, to whom it would never occur to think of the state in life of his inquirer.

Let a woman be frank, amiable and devoid of self-consciousness in the spirit of her letters, when she engages in any correspondence such as is above considered. As to the substance of it, let it be brief and to the point.

Brevity should not involve curtness nor obscurity.

A letter of ten lines may be long, if the business could have been easily despatched in five lines. On the other hand, a letter of six pages may be short, if the importance of the business, and the necessity for a clear and explicit statement demand it.

In such correspondence a woman may sometimes find that a man of kind heart and good intentions, to whom she inevitably contracts obligations on her own account or that of her charities, is deficient in the minor graces of perfect courtesy. She may find sometimes a touch of business brusquerie which makes her feel she has perhaps blundered by proffering a request at a difficult time. But that does not excuse her for the omission of a single detail of consideration on her part, in the transaction of the business that remains to be done; nor of any remissness or coldness in her note of thanks; nor of the obligation of showing in time to come her gratitude and appreciation in any becoming and possible way.

She is responsible for her own behavior, and while she must never be importunate, no small omission on the part of one who serves her cordially in large things, justifies the showing of wounded pride by reciprocal omissions.

X.

Misunderstandings by Mail.



HERE are hundreds of virtuous, kind-hearted, and well-bred people who would never transgress on any of the points mentioned in the foregoing chapters, who will yet impulsively attempt the difficult and dangerous task of rectifying their misunderstandings with friends by means of correspondence.

Difficult, we say, for it would take reams of paper and quarts of ink, even under favorable circumstances, to accomplish the result that might be arrived at in an hour's conversation; and, dangerous, because the parties to the correspondence being out of touch with each other, so to speak, the written words are capable according to the mood of the receiver, of taking on a meaning never intended, and cannot be helped out, as in personal intercourse, with the tones and inflections, the looks and the gestures which give to language half its meaning.

Then, there are men and women, warm-hearted, demonstrative in manner, fluent in conversation, too, who have no facility in written expression. They chill and stiffen the moment they put pen to paper.

I have known a man of this type, who, writing to his wife, would begin, "Dear Jane," and end, "Yours truly"; and another, the kindest and fondest of relatives, who would write from the most interesting scenes, which he would describe in person with life-like vividness, the meagerest and driest of notes, without a word of endearment, and concluding invariably, as he might conclude a letter to the merest acquaintance. I have seen the same peculiarity, though less frequently, with affectionate and demonstrative women.

Manifestly, the person of similar temperament, but so fluent with his pen that his letters really reflect his personality, would never straighten out a tangle by correspondence with friends of the type above described.

Let us take a case where the attempt is made. Two women have long been friends, but by reason of near neighborhood, common interests, and opportunities for frequent interchange of visits they have almost never had occasion for correspondence.

On one unfortunate evening they are together at a little social assemblage, or their club or charity meeting. Marion has had domestic worries during the day, and is in a morbidly sensitive condition. She has counted on walking home with her friend, and relieving her mind a little.

Susan, not being gifted with second-sight, knows nothing of this; and being, moreover, quite pre-occupied during the evening with another old friend, whom she has less frequent opportunities of meeting, observes nothing unusual about Marion, simply exchanges greetings with her, and hurries home to some waiting duty, without offering the explanation that she does not know is needed.

If Marion were in her normal state, she would take no offence, and would run in the following day for a morning chat over her trouble. But with her mental vision a little awry with her own especial grievance, she sees everything out of proportion, and after brooding over her friend's unusual action half the night, convinces herself that she has been purposely snubbed and slighted.

And then in an evil hour, she writes Susan a sorrowful and mildly reproachful note, very vague as to the offence committed, and very clear as to her own wounded feelings.

Susan is mystified and hurt. Her first and best impulse is to go right to her friend, and find out what the difficulty really is. But her pride is up, and she won't be outdone as a letter-writer. Her response falls like lead on the heart of her sensitive friend. Letters fly back and forth for a few days. The writers get down in swift gradation from "Dear Marion" and "Dear Susan" to "Miss Jones" and "Miss Robinson"; so much irrelevant matter is introduced that the original difficulty is lost sight of; each discovers heretofore unsuspected defects and causes of offence in the other, and their friendship receives a wound which, if not fatal, is exceedingly dangerous and slow to heal.

And here let us say, in all earnestness: Don't believe the silly sentimentalists who tell you that lovers or friends find their love or friendship only cemented by little quarrels. Things are said in these differences that humble and hurt, and are never, however fervent the reconciliation, wholly forgotten; nor the constraint which they occasion wholly removed.

In the case of lovers or friends, one or other must be very magnanimous, patient and forbearing, if their mutual relations are not to be eventually the cause of more grief than joy.

“Beware the entrance to a quarrel,” but if you come to it, don’t stand on ceremony as to who should take the step that safely carries both past the danger.

Be sure you really have a grievance, before you demand an explanation. If you think you have, try to see your friend and talk it out together. You will generally find that you have been shying at shadows.

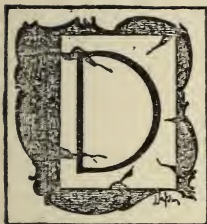
If you must write, be generous. Don’t accuse. In a case like the common one above given, say something like this, —

“DEAR FRIEND :— I had wanted especially to talk with you last night ; and am grieved because you went away without seeming to know or notice. Maybe you had some anxiety of your own. When can I see you for a good chat ? ”

It may cost a little sacrifice of one’s pride to write a note like this : but no harm can possibly come of it. On the contrary, it will scatter the little mist, as a fresh breeze would, and leave the light of your friendship undiminished.

XI.

When Silence is Golden.



ON'T write when you are vexed — however just the provocation. You will surely say something that you will later have cause to wish unsaid.

If you have received a captious, fretful, bitter, unjust, or even spiteful and impertinent letter, the best rebuke you can possibly give the writer is absolutely to ignore it. To "talk back" with your pen puts the offender on her mettle. After she sent that letter, ten to one she would have been glad to call it back. She had a bad quarter of an hour thinking how you would receive it. But your answer comes at once, full of annoyance and pain. She begins to justify herself, and your peace of mind and dignity suffer.

Pay no apparent attention to the unjust or impertinent letter. Give its writer time to think it over, and, in all probability, she will eventually see her

blunder and try to repair it. If she does not, you are still the gainer by ceasing to hold intercourse with her.

Christian charity obliges us to feel kindly and act kindly to all ; but it does not oblige us to invite insults for the sake of forgiving them ; nor to keep our minds in a state of unrest and sadness by intercourse with people to whom we are not bound by duty, and with whom, by reason of difference in temperament and training, we could never assimilate.

Outside of such cases as the above, however, a lady tries to answer as promptly and fully as possible all the letters which she receives.

Business letters, for obvious reasons, should never be allowed to stand unanswered. Remittances should be immediately acknowledged ; if only by a line or two. Accounts rendered should be met by full payment, if possible ; partial payment as next best thing ; or a word of courteous explanation, if the delay of payment be inevitable.

If you have given your name as a reference — and need we emphasize the necessity for caution and conscience in doing this? — to any one seeking employment, be prompt in answering the letter of his or her possible employer. Remember that the whole future of a fellow-being may hang on your prompt and kind keeping of your word.

A question arises here as to how far the men and women whose reputation makes them, in a sense, public characters, are in conscience or courtesy bound to answer the questions which the mail is constantly pouring in upon them. It were a heavy task to count the requests for financial assistance, for employment, for "influence," for advice, for co-operation in charitable schemes, that beset the public man, or the woman of letters, in the course of a month, both from friends and acquaintances and from absolute strangers. It is part of the penalty of fame.

"I should have to employ an extra clerk, and increase my income about \$10,000 a year to be able to cover these demands," said an eminent professional man, of his own case.

And a well-known woman of letters declared that she would need about three hours a day to cover the interrogations that drifted in daily to her desk.

"I have had scarcely a letter to-day," she said, pointing to a large pile, "that did not contain a request for something or other, most of them preferred by people I never saw nor heard of."

Mrs. S. encloses tickets for the appearance, under her patronage of a young dramatic reader — "A very select affair, dear; right in my own drawing-room.

Tickets \$2 apiece, and you won't mind taking three, to help the dear girl."

Miss Brown, of whom an intimate friend says that she lies awake nights devising schemes to plunder her friends in the interest of her beneficiaries, invites a subscription of ten dollars to a testimonial which she is getting up for a most estimable lady who needs a trip to Europe for her health.

A young widow, a perfect stranger, writes from New Orleans to ask her to find a newspaper correspondence for her in Boston. She thinks she can write; she once won a prize for a Prohibition story.

Another woman dumps upon the long-suffering author a MS. of two hundred pages, requesting a written criticism of it, at her earliest convenience.

A college youth wants material for a certain biographical sketch which he is asked to prepare for the commencement.

A young teacher wants paying work on a newspaper during her summer vacation so she "won't lose any time."

A man who is getting up a library for sailors wants autograph copies of all her works.

A pious lady who is conducting a journal for a church fair wants from her an article for each of its six issues — the first one to be delivered to-morrow.

Miss E., whom she knows but slightly, asks her to arrange a lecture tour for her through the New England States.

And Miss F., whom she never met but once, and of whom she knows absolutely nothing, wants permission to use her name as a reference in her application for a place as invalid's companion.

How should this woman, with more demands on her time and money than she can possibly respond to, dispose of these letters?

She should have the courage to return out of the three tickets for the dramatic recital, the two which she cannot afford to take.

Prudence, as well as kindness, may oblige her to participate in the testimonial; but she will not offend against charity nor courtesy by returning the MS. unread, referring the college youth to the Public Library, and letting the rest of the letters go by default.

A lady will think more than twice before she writes a letter to an absolute stranger, especially a letter soliciting a favor.

The fact that the literary, or musical, or artistic work of man or woman is before the public, does not make the author, or musical composer, or artist, public property.

We do not speak, now, of course, of the letters of appreciation and grateful acknowledgment to author or artist for pleasure or benefit derived from his book, or song, or picture ; nor the word of intelligent criticism, or suggestion, or even remonstrance, which is sometimes in order ; nor the welcome line of encouragement which the older worker sends out of a kind and helpful heart to the young beginner on the road to the temple of fame.

We speak only of the unreason of writing to one of whose private life and circumstances we know nothing, but whose public work is manifestly of a nature to absorb most of his time and strength, to request services which would involve a great outlay of both, especially when he knows nothing of our character nor capabilities except what our exceedingly inconsiderate letter reveals.

The public man or the woman of letters is under no obligation to take the slightest notice of these petitions. It is a stretch of kindness and courtesy, if he or she send a line of acknowledgment and regret.

If we but stop a moment and consider what the obligatory labor of the statesman and the successful author must be ; also, that they probably have in addition family cares, and that being mere mortals

they need rest and recreation, we will hesitate before we write in the interest of the Women's Rest Tour to Bourke Cochran or Frederic Coudert; or ask Richard Malcolm Johnston to read our little MS. novel of five hundred pages; or Edmund Clarence Stedman to look up a publisher and secure favorable terms for our first volume of poems; or Agnes Repplier to arrange the course of lectures which we long to give but which the world is not, perhaps, quite ready for. Nor shall we expect the overworked journalist, whose time is but little at his own disposal, to go about arranging syndicates for us.

Such requests as above alluded to are made in utter ignorance of the time and effort which are needed, even under reasonable and favorable conditions, to set such enterprises as we are interested in afloat.

It should be needless to say that we should not ask references of people who do not know us; and yet what prominent personage has not been called upon to stand social or business sponsor to people of whom he hardly knows the face and name?

Again, let us be considerate in the pushing of good works, and the solicitation of financial help, with public men, however rich they are reputed to be, or

however generous ; or how worthy, soever, the charity we are forwarding.

We are doubtless but one of many, and there is a limit to the longest purse.



XII.

Letters of Courteous and Loving Duty.



UT for ourselves, who are not rich nor famous, and whose correspondence, therefore, is only of the ordinary family, friendly, and social order, let us answer promptly those letters which demand response.

Such, of course, are all invitations to social functions. It is not enough, in such cases, to assume that "silence gives consent"; one should write at once and definitely whether or not one can accept the invitation to a dinner-party, ball, musical, luncheon, tea, formal reception, or other social event.

The reason for this is obvious.

For her table arrangements, grouping of guests, etc., the hostess needs to know as early as possible how many and whom she must plan for. And this holds as good for the little social events among people of moderate means as the great "functions" among the late Ward McAllister's "Four Hundred."

There is only one way to acknowledge a formal invitation ; and that is by a formal note of acceptance or regret, addressed to the one who sends the invitation. One may be very well acquainted with the sister or cousin or aunt of the prospective hostess, but one is not therefore justified in sending word by any of these personages — “ I’ll come.”

There are few things which conduce more to the preservation of cordial and unconstrained intercourse even between intimate friends, or prospective relatives than the observance of the little formalities instituted to keep society pleasantly together. Why should one’s dearest friend, or one’s sister or brother who, residing at the other end of a large city is sometimes more easily reached by a note than by a personal visit, neglect to answer as to whether or not he or she can meet the friends from Philadelphia to whom one is to give a tea the next Sunday evening ? Let us consider as we would be considered in all these things.

A lady is prompt in her letters of congratulation to her relatives and friends, whom she cannot reach in person, on all the occasions which custom and good feeling decide to be so remembered ; as betrothals, marriages, birthdays, and wedding anniversaries ; ordinations and religious professions, and their more

important anniversaries, as silver and golden jubilee days ; notable accessions of fortune or honor.

Such letters should not be perfunctory, but hearty and joyous. No irrelevant matter — especially of an uncongenial kind — should be introduced. The writer should not point morals, nor draw contrasts, nor intimate that love may fail, and that fortune is fickle. Half-hearted and grudging congratulations are better unsaid ; and compliments with a monition included are not allowable, at least between people of equal age and condition.

Letters of sympathy are even a more delicate test of the good feeling and good taste of the writer. The condolences that are sent with evident intention to save the writer the trouble, or the strain on her feelings, of a personal call, were much better unwritten.

“ But I never know what to say on a call of condolence,” says a young friend. “ And I’d rather go without my breakfast than write a letter of condolence.”

The question is rather of what not to say at such calls, and in our letters of sympathy. But the right thing and the kind thing is to call on your bereaved friend as soon as possible after the bereavement. She may not be able to see you, but she will certainly

appreciate your thought of her. But if she can see you, your sympathetic silence, the tender clasp of your hand, your very presence will say everything. If, however, distance or other good cause hinders your call, be very careful about your letter. The bereaved heart is sensitive. I beg you will not write that you meant to call, but the day was so hot, or so cold, or so rainy. Or that you would have come on a certain afternoon, only it was so hard to get a car—as if there were not seven afternoons and as many mornings and evenings in a week! Or, you thought of calling on a certain day, but you had to go out to Cohasset to those delightful people, the Gays; and so on. These examples are not drawn from fancy; I have very lately seen letters of condolence on the above plan, and from one who would be painfully surprised if she knew that any one questioned either her politeness or her kindness of heart.

Letters of this sort offend against courtesy and kindness both.

The thought which will rectify our action in such cases is “How would I like to be dealt with in my own sorrow?”

You know you would not like to sit solitary in the desolated house in the first dreadful weeks following

on death's visit. You know it would grieve you to find that a friend — lavish, in sunny days, of protestations of affection — would not bear a trifling discomfort from heat or cold, nor postpone a pleasure for your sake in your sorrow.

Don't take the preacher's tone in your letters. Let them show, especially in the first weeks of bereavement, that you share your friend's grief. Speak of the Divine consolations, and of resignation to the Divine Will, but tenderly, modestly, humbly, that the sorrowing heart may not feel chilled nor rebuked.

Here, especially, the respective relations of writer and recipient must be sedulously remembered. Here, again, even more carefully than in letters of opposite character, are the formal and perfunctory to be avoided.

After all, the kind and considerate heart alone can guide the hand aright in letters of sympathy and all other correspondence.

XIII.

What to do with Anonymous Letters.



FOR a last word let us touch briefly on that epistolary pest, the anonymous letter. I will not say that a lady never receives one. There are too many spiteful and envious people in the world, for the winner of any notable success not to be the probable target of these poison-tipped darts, whose point of departure cannot be traced back.

Yet I have known more than one woman of sufficiently marked social or professional success, and charm of person or manner to make her an object of envy to small and jealous natures, who, notwithstanding, never received an anonymous letter; just as she never received distasteful observation or attention in travelling. Such a woman is of the few who, by the meekness with which they wear their distinction, and their unremitting kindness and interest in others' successes, somewhat veil their own, and by disarming jealousy, escape its more active demonstrations.

But such women are but a small fraction of one per cent. of the attractive and successful of their sex.

The favorite feminine target of the anonymous letter-writer seems to be the woman who is receiving marked attentions or who is known to be engaged. The phenomenal woman above noted escapes the anonymous letter-writer by an unannounced and very brief engagement. But for the average young betrothed, half the joy of the time is in her right to receive her lover's open devotion and to show her pride in him; in the family festivities and the congratulations of her friends. But some day comes the letter signed "A Friend," "A Well-Wisher," "One Who Knows," or any other cowardly mask of a signature. There are dark hints, ordinarily reflecting on the past or present life of her lover, sometimes thinly disguised jests or gibes. But the object is always the same — to excite suspicion and thus poison happiness. The young wife, as well as the young betrothed, is often the victim of these vicious missives.

Now what does a prudent woman, with proper respect for herself and for the man to whom she is betrothed, or whose name she bears, under such circumstances? Just one thing. She burns the anonymous letter and forgets it. She does not carry it one

hour on her person ; she takes no one into her confidence about it ; she makes no attempt to identify the handwriting. She contemptuously ignores it, and goes her way untroubled.

There may be an exceptional case of persecution by anonymous letter which will justify man or woman in having recourse to the protection of the law ; but ordinarily, the letters cease if they are disregarded, and this is true of anonymous letters of every sort.

The anonymous troubler of your peace has an eye on you, be sure. If he find that the poisoned arrows are broken against the granite of your confidence and reserve, he will soon tire of the amusement of shooting them at you, and will try them on more vulnerable material.

Need we add that a lady never, for any conceivable motive, writes an anonymous letter ? There is never a justification for it. One should not write a line to any human being on any subject to which one would shrink from affixing the full signature.

The anonymous letter, whose contents are trivial and innocent, is silly ; the anonymous letter containing a grave charge is cowardly. If you know that a danger threatens a friend, give her warning, and tell her honestly on what your apprehensions are founded.

Or, in the case of the young and inexperienced, warn parents or guardians.

If you cannot do this, hold your peace.

Another thing — let nothing tempt a woman into anything like a familiar correspondence with man or woman whom she has never seen, and as to whose personality and circumstances she has no reliable information. If any one wants to know, not the dangerous, but the ridiculous and unpleasant possibilities of such a correspondence, let her read that clever story of Maria Edgeworth's, "*L'Amie Inconnue*," which we would like better with the plain English title of "*The Unknown Friend*."

If the foregoing little papers, collected in their present form at the request of many friends, need justification may it not be found in the tremendous postal service, one-third at least of whose energies are employed in the transmission of letters which should never have been written?



